DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 312 050 PS 018 300

AUTHOR Eddowes, E. Anne; Dreyspring, Marianne
TITLE A Comparison of Play Opportunities Available in Day Care Centers and Family Day Care Homes.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Day Care Centers; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Environment; Educational Equipment; *Family Day Care; Learning Centers (Classroom); *Peer Relationship; *Play; Scheduling; Urban Areas
IDENTIFIERS Alabama (Birmingham); *Program Characteristics; *Salience

ABSTRACT

Day care center directors and family day care providers were surveyed concerning play opportunities in their programs. Three areas were considered: the physical environment, the importance of play in the program, and peer interaction patterns. Participants included 177 family day care providers and directors from 148 full-day care centers with 243 child care programs, including 95 programs for children to 30 months of age and 148 programs for children from 30 months to 5 years of age. All homes and centers were located in the Birmingham, Alabama metropolitan area. Data were gathered on an 18-item questionnaire. Results showed more differences than similarities between the two types of care. Nonstructured play was important in both settings. Neither setting offered children a choice of learning centers during nonstructured play. Learning centers were not often set up outside at either setting. In comparison to homes, day care centers had more interest areas, outside play equipment, outdoor play, and children playing alone. In family day care homes, more time was allotted to both inside and outside play in the mornings, and children were encouraged to play together more often. Although no difference was found between the types of care in the degree to which children were given a choice of learning centers indoors, survey responses suggested differing perceptions about the need for structure. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED312050

A COMPARISON OF PLAY OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE IN DAY CARE CENTERS AND FAMILY DAY CARE HOMES

E. Anne Eddowes
Marianne Dreyspring

University of Alabama at Birmingham

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

E. Anne Eddowes
Marianne Dreyspring

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 018000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

Center directors and family day care providers were surveyed concerning play opportunities in their programs. Non-structured play was important in both settings, but centers were more likely to have a balance of inside/outside activities and to provide for both solitary and interactive play.

Child care centers and family day care homes are popular options in which care is provided for young children outside of their own homes. Although there are similarities and differences between the two types of care (Clarke-Stewart, 1982), both usually include non-structured play in the daily program (Highberger & Schramm, 1976; Murphy, 1984).

Play researchers have produced a number of scholarly articles and books during the last century. Diverse topics have been covered such as indoor play environments (Teets, 1984); playgrounds (Frost & Klein, 1979); the importance of play (Athey, 1984); and the role of the adult in play (Almy, Monighan, Scales & Van Hoorn, 1984). Although there is an abundance of research concerning various aspects of play, little information could be found which compared the play activities present in day care centers with those available in family day care homes.

In this project, play opportunities were examined in both types of settings. Three areas were considered important. First, the physical environment has been found to relate to children's play, with inside and outside activities complementing each other in the child's development (Henninger, 1985). Second, although play has been considered an important part of the early childhood curriculum for years (Frank, 1968), there has been a recent trend to provide more structure in some programs

(Clarke-Stewart, 1982). The importance of play can vary depending on the emphasis placed upon it by supervising adults (McKee, 1986).

Last, peer interaction in play for the socialization process continues to be of prime importance for many caregivers. Generally, this aspect of play found its roots in the research of M. B. Parten (1932), whose classic study demonstrated a play hierarchy which begins with solitary play (infant), and ends with cooperative play (kindergarten child). In this hierarchy, solitary play was judged immature behavior in children over two years of age. More recent research (Barnes, 1971; Moore, Evertson & Brophy, 1974) has questioned the use of a social participation index. Newer studies suggest that with somewhat older children (3-5 years), solitary play can involve goal-directed activities which show independent behavior and demonstrate maturity (Rubin, 1982; Smith, 1978).

Due to a lack of existing research related to contrasts in play opportunities between the two types of care, it was hypothesized that there would be no differences.

Method

Subjects

Participants included directors from 148 full day care centers with 243 child care programs (95 programs for children 0-30 months; 148 programs for children 30 months

through 5 years). This represented about 75% of the full day care centers operating in the area. There were also 177 family day care providers who participated (serving children 0-5 years). This represented about 72% of the available family day care homes. All participants were from the Birmingham, Alabama metropolitan area. They each agreed to complete a short survey concerning play opportunities available in their programs. Not all subjects answered each question on the survey. The totals of completed responses for each item are shown in the accompanying tables.

Instrumentation

A survey was designed which included 18 items related to play opportunities both indoors and outdoors during the daily program. Questions covered the three major areas outlined in the introduction. There were eight questions concerning physical environment, four questions related to the importance of play in the program, and six questions concerning child interaction patterns. Each question, except for those related to time, had three answers from which to choose (ie. always, sometimes, rarely).

Procedure

All full day care centers in the Birmingham area were contacted. Since some centers in Alabama have license waivers, both licensed and unlicensed centers were represented. Licensing requirements in Alabama

make it necessary to have separate programs in the same day care center for children 0-30 months and those 30 months through 5 years. If centers had separate programs for the two age groups, information was requested from each so that the age range 0-5 years was represented.

Directors of the centers were telephoned and asked if they would be willing to complete a short questionnaire concerning play opportunities in their facility. A copy (two copies if the center had both infant-toddler and preschool programs) was mailed to the center director with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If the survey was not returned within three weeks, a follow-up call was made. In some cases, a second copy of the survey was mailed.

Most licensed family day care home providers in the area are members of the federal day care food program. They attend four workshops each year. Providers each completed a play survey at the beginning of one of the workshops.

In order to make comparisons between programs, survey results from both age groups in center-based programs were combined so that all programs serving the ages 0-5 years could be used to compare with the family day care home programs which serve children in that age range. Information from the surveys was coded and processed using both chi-square analyses and *t* tests.

Results

Contrary to the hypothesis that no differences would be found between play opportunities available in day care centers and family day care homes, results showed more differences than similarities. In the area of physical environment indoors (TABLE 1), there were more learning centers (interest areas) available inside in day care centers. Interest areas were likely to be arranged for multi-child use, although they were sometimes limited to one child at a time. In neither setting did the majority of programs allow children a choice of learning centers during non-structured play.

In center-based programs, children were more likely to be playing outdoors each day (TABLE 2). There was more outside play equipment to be found at centers, and children were likely to be allowed a choice of outside interest areas. However, specific learning centers were not often set up outside in either centers or homes.

Both centers and homes indicated that non-structured play was important inside, but in centers, outdoor play was considered somewhat more important than in homes (TABLE 3). However, substantially more time was allotted to play in the morning both inside and outside in family day care homes (TABLE 4). In the afternoon, there was no difference in time allotment between the settings either inside or outside.

Children were encouraged to play together more often in family day care homes. There was no difference in the incidence of group games in either setting. However, some children were more likely to play with other children in centers (TABLE 5).

It was more likely to find some children playing alone in day care centers (TABLE 6). Although children usually weren't encouraged to play alone in either setting, both settings sometimes included individual play activities.

Discussion

Non-structured play was important in both settings, but differences existed between the play opportunities available in day care centers and family day care homes. The results will be discussed as they relate to the three areas addressed in this study.

Physical Environment: Center-based programs provide care for a number of children at one time. They are usually grouped by age. It is understandable that more learning centers (interest areas) would be found indoors in that setting and arranged for multi-child use. Likewise, in managing a number of children at one time, but also providing for individuals, it may sometimes be important to limit some areas to one child at a time.

On the contrary, in a day care home there are fewer children and a wider age range per group. Activities are likely to take place in certain areas of the house (ie.

"messy" activities in the kitchen). There is less need for separate learning areas, and there should be enough space in the home for children in care to each have an individual space for a quiet activity (Murphy, 1984). Although less learning centers were found in homes than in center-based programs, it was not necessarily a disadvantage if programs provided similar developmentally appropriate activities.

No difference was found between types of care in allowing children a choice of learning centers indoors, but it is interesting to note that the survey answers were divided between "always" and "sometimes" in allowing a choice. This may have reflected a variation in the amount of structure the caregiver(s) perceived as important in each setting (Barbour, 1987; Murphy, 1984).

Information concerning outside play had an interesting contradiction. In day care centers, outdoor play was considered more important than it was in the homes. The majority of centers indicated they had outside play on a regular basis. However, in day care homes, although more time was allotted for outside play in the morning, it didn't necessarily take place. Since day care centers usually schedule the outside play time by group of children, caregivers would be likely to take children outside as scheduled. In contrast, the family day care provider might allot a block time for outside play, but could more easily change plans if necessary.

It wasn't surprising to find that outside play equipment was more prevalent in centers. It is more cost effective to provide that kind of equipment in a program serving a large number of children. Concerning learning areas outside, far more day care centers allowed a free choice than did homes. This could have been due to supervision and safety factors. It is easier to manage a multi-age group having one caregiver when activities are controlled. In a day care center, there are often more caregivers providing supervision outside at one time.

Importance of Play: Although non-structured play was considered important in both settings, the total amount of time allotted for non-structured play both inside and outside varied considerably in the morning. Day care homes had more time allotted than centers. This could have been related to the structure of the program, with homes being somewhat more flexible in their scheduling of the morning activities. There was no difference between settings in the afternoon. Both seemed to devote most of the afternoon after naptime to non-structured play.

Child Social Interaction: Although solitary play was rarely encouraged in either setting, in day care centers some children played alone and some played with other children. In contrast, children in day care homes were encouraged to play together and were not as likely to play alone.

Since day care centers had more children playing alone and weren't as likely to encourage children to play together, even if it wasn't planned, centers provided more support for individual play choices than did homes. In day care homes, caregivers may believe that children should interact no matter what the age or interest of the child. This is interesting because, with the small group size and the space available in a home, it should be relatively easy to provide for a balance of solitary and interactive play.

In conclusion, although non-structured play was found to be important in the majority of day care centers and homes, there were important differences found in both the physical play environments and child interaction patterns. These differences should be of interest to caregivers in planning their programs, as well as to parents who arrange for their children's care.

Generally, results indicated that there was a balance of play activities available inside and outside in center-based programs, which included support for children's individuality. Although the day care homes in this study had the same potential, problems of supervising and planning for a small vertical age group may have limited the children's choices, particularly outdoors.

This study was conducted in one southeastern community. Although participation was relatively high, there were programs which weren't represented, and all questions

weren't always answered. Information concerning specific program content would have been interesting but was beyond the scope of the project.

Further research is needed concerning reasons for differences in play interaction in each setting. It may have been related to the educational background and/or philosophy of the caregivers, or merely to group size. Finally, if solitary play has benefit for children throughout the early years, then the information should be made available to caregivers in both day care centers and family day care homes with practical suggestions for programming.

References

Almy, M., Monignan, P., Scales, B. & Van Hoorn, J. (1984). Recent research on play: The perspective of the teacher. In L. B. Katz (Ed.), Current topics in early education, (Vol 5) (pp. 1-25). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Athey, I. (1984). Contributions of play to development. In T. D. Yawkey & A. D. Pellegrini (Eds.). Child's play: Developmental and applied (pp. 9-27). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Barbour, N. (1987). Curriculum concepts and priorities. Childhood Education, 63, 331-336.

Barnes, K. E. (1971). Preschool play norms: A replication. Developmental Psychology, 5, 99-103.

Clarke-Stewart, A. (1982). Daycare. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frank, L. K. (1968). Play is valid. Childhood Education, 44, 433-440.

Frost, J. L., & Klein, B. L. (1979). Children's play and playgrounds. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Henniger, M. L. (1985). Preschool children's play behaviors in an indoor and outdoor environment. In J. L. Frost & S. Sunderlin (Eds.). When children play (pp. 145-149), Wheaton, MD: Assn. Childhood Education Int.

Highberger, R., & Schramm, C. (1976). Child development for day care workers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

McKee, J. S. (1986). Forward. In J. S. McKee (Ed.). Play: Working partner of growth. Wheaton, MD: Assn. Childhood Education Int.

Moore, N. V., Evertson, C. M., & Brophy, J. E. (1974). Solitary play: Some functional considerations. Developmental Psychology, 10, 830-834.

Murphy, K. (1984). A house full of kids. Boston: Beacon Press.

Parten, M. B. (1932). Social participation among preschool children. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 27, 242-69.

Rubin, K. E., (1982). Nonsocial play in preschoolers: Necessary evil? Child Development, 53, 651-657.

Smith, P. K. (1978). A longitudinal study of social participation in preschool children: Solitary and parallel play reexamined. Developmental Psychology, 14, 517-523.

Teets, S. (1985). Modification of play behaviors of preschool children through manipulation of environmental variables. In J. L. Frost & S. Sunderlin (Eds.). When children play (pp. 265-272). Wheaton, MD: Assn. Childhood Education Int.

TABLE 1

Physical Environment: Indoors

	Center Programs	Homes	X^2
%Availability of Learning Centers	N=243	N=174	
Many	68.7	30.5	62.62***
Some	28.8	67.8	
None	2.5	1.7	
%Programs Children Allowed Choice of Learning Centers	N=240	N=173	
Always	47.1	41.0	2.64
Sometimes	49.6	56.6	
Rarely	3.3	2.3	
%Learning Centers Arranged for Multi-Child Use	N=240	N=174	
Yes	90.8	75.3	18.45***
Some	7.5	20.7	
No	1.7	4.0	
%Learning Centers Limited to One Child	N=239	N=173	
Yes	7.9	13.3	11.96**
Sometimes	38.5	23.1	
No	53.6	63.6	

***p <.001)

**p <.01)

TABLE 2

Physical Environment: Outdoors

	Center Programs	Homes	X^2
%Children Play Outside	N=243	N=177	
Yes	94.7	68.4	51.92***
Sometimes	4.9	26.6	
No	.4	5.1	
%Outside Play Equipment	N=241	N=175	
Much	71.0	23.4	93.48***
Some	25.3	60.6	
Little	3.7	16.0	
%Learning Centers Set Up	N=235	N=152	
Often	23.4	13.8	5.59
Sometimes	48.9	57.2	
Never	27.7	28.9	
%Programs Children Allowed Choice of Learning Areas	N=235	N=160	
Always	74.9	31.9	73.92***
Sometimes	22.6	55.6	
Rarely	2.6	12.5	

***$p<.001$

TABLE 3

Importance of Non-Structured (Free Choice) Play

	Center Programs	Homes	X^2
%Indoor Play	N=239	N=167	
Very Important	72.8	73.1	1.46
Somewhat Important	27.2	26.3	
Not Important		.6	
%Outdoor Play	N=239	N=162	
Very Important	78.3	74.8	6.70*
Somewhat Important	20.4	19.2	
Not Important	1.3	6.0	

*$p<.05$

TABLE 4

Minutes Allotted for Non-Structured (Free Choice) Play

		Center Programs	Homes	t
Indoor (morning)	N	234	142	
	M	76.58	97.04	-3.54***
	SD	47.98	57.79	
Outdoor (morning)	N	222	118	
	M	48.26	70.10	-5.39***
	SD	23.85	40.44	
Indoor (afternoon)	N	229	134	
	M	91.88	90.66	.23
	SD	47.58	49.04	
Outdoor (afternoon)	N	224	118	
	M	75.79	75.71	.02
	SD	41.63	42.17	

***$p<.001$

TABLE 5

Child Peer Interaction

	Center Programs	Homes	X^2
%Programs Encouraging Children to Play Together	N=239	N=162	
Always	66.9	85.2	16.83***
Sometimes	31.8	14.2	
Rarely	1.3	.6	
%Programs with Group Games	N=240	N=160	
Often	52.1	61.9	5.20
Sometimes	42.9	36.3	
Rarely	5.0	1.9	
%Programs Some Children Likely to Play with Other Children	N=239	N=163	
Yes	79.5	77.3	6.70*
Sometimes	19.7	17.8	
No	.8	4.9	

***$p<.001$

*$p<.05$

TABLE 6

Child Playing Alone

	Center Programs	Homes	X^2
%Programs Some Children Likely to Play Alone	N=240	N=158	
Yes	45.4	23.4	29.20***
Sometimes	45.4	51.3	
No	9.2	25.3	
%Programs Encouraging Children to Play Alone	N=240	N=160	
Often	1.3	3.8	4.07
Sometimes	40.4	33.8	
Rarely	58.3	62.5	
%Programs Including Individual Play Activities	N=240	N=156	
Often	32.9	34.0	.15
Sometimes	47.5	45.5	
Rarely	19.6	20.5	

***$p<.001$